

**To:** Cabinet  
**Date:** 18 March 2026  
**Report of:** Director of Economy, Regeneration and Sustainability  
**Title of Report:** Project approval and delegations for the Sandy Lane Recreation ground affordable housing development

## Summary and recommendations

**Decision being taken:** The report seeks project approval and delegations in relation to the affordable housing scheme at the Sandy Lane Recreation Ground, together with the relocation of football pitches and providing changing facilities and storage as set out in the report. The report also seeks approval to commence the process for the appropriation of the land from its current purpose (including recreation ground and open space) to a planning purpose, within the General Fund. The report further notes the future intention, subject to separate decision of Full Council, to appropriate land from the General Fund (“GF”) to the Housing Revenue Account (“HRA”), prior to completion of the scheme.

**Key decision:** No

[Issue details - Project Approval and Delegations for Sandy Lane Recreation Ground affordable housing scheme | Oxford City Council](#)

**Cabinet Member:** Councillor Linda Smith, Cabinet Member for Housing  
 Councillor Ed Turner, Cabinet Member for Finance and Asset Management

**Corporate Priority:** More Affordable Housing

**Policy Framework:** Housing and Homelessness Strategy 2023 to 2028

**Recommendation(s):** That Cabinet resolves to:

1. **Grant project approval** noting Full Council allocation of the £97,551,302 budget for this scheme within the Housing Revenue Account Capital Programme as part of its budget setting in February 2026, to fund the development of this scheme, as a proposed Housing Revenue Account (“HRA”) project, as set out in this report, within the allocated HRA capital budget and business plan, for the purpose of delivering more affordable housing in Oxford on the Sandy Lane Recreation Ground site;
2. **Delegate authority** to the Deputy Chief Executive – City and Citizens’ Services in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Housing; the Group Finance Director/Section 151 Officer; and the Council’s Monitoring Officer, to enter into design and build contracts and any other necessary agreements to facilitate the scheme development within the identified budget, except where there is an existing officer delegation within the Council’s Constitution. Facilitating the scheme development includes the relocation of football pitches and providing a pavilion as set out in the report;
3. **Agree** to commence the process for the appropriation of this Site (as per the red line shown at para 12) to a planning purpose, following completion and handover of the replacement playing pitch facilities at Herschel Crescent and **note** the intention to bring forward a further report for Cabinet to consider the appropriation of the Site from recreation/open space purposes to planning purposes and the potential to rely on *section 203 of the Housing and Planning Act 2016* in the event of interference with private rights;
4. **Note** the intent to take a report to the Full Council seeking approval for the subsequent appropriation of the Site from the General Fund (GF) to the HRA (prior to practical completion of the scheme or delivery of the first phase, if delivery of the units is phased).

<b>Appendix No.</b>	<b>Appendix Title</b>	<b>Exempt from Publication</b>
<b>Appendix 1</b>	Financial Information for the Sandy Lane Recreation Ground development	This information is exempted from publication under Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972 on the following basis: <b>Commercial Sensitivity</b>
<b>Appendix 2</b>	Risk Register	No
<b>Appendix 3</b>	Equalities Impact Assessment	No

**Introduction**

1. The Council continues to develop a supply programme to deliver more affordable housing through multiple delivery routes. These include direct delivery schemes; partnerships and joint ventures; regeneration projects; acquisitions and advance purchase agreements; and enabling work with Registered Providers, community-led Housing groups, and other partners. Direct delivery schemes can comprise of development delivered directly by the Council (where the Council procures and directly contracts with a design and construction contractor to develop housing) and also developments brought forward by Oxford City Housing Limited (OCH(D)L (where the Council engages OCH(D)L to act as a developer, to procure and contract with a design and construction contractor to develop housing, usually involving a sale of the Council's land to OCH(D)L and purchase back of completed development).
1. Across the four-year period from April 2025 to March 2029, the Council's Affordable Housing Supply Programme aims to deliver over 1,600 new affordable tenure homes with at least 850 of these at the most affordable Social Rent level.
2. This report concerns the Sandy Lane Recreation Ground scheme. It seeks Cabinet approval to progress the scheme as detailed in this report through direct delivery by the Council, funded via the HRA. The recommended approach is to appoint OCH(D)L - trading as OX Place - as the Council's Development Agent to project manage the scheme and administer a design and construction contract on the Council's behalf, as this represents the most appropriate delivery model for the scheme, as it is delivering 100% affordable housing for the HRA on Council owned land.
3. For the purposes of this report, OCH(D)L will be referred to as OCHL. The arrangement will be formalised through a Development Services Agreement (DSA) between the Council and OCHL.

## **Background**

2. The Sandy Lane scheme is allocated in the current Local Plan 2036 and in the emerging Local Plan 2045 where it proposes residential development at Sandy Lane, delivering a minimum of 300 homes.
3. The proposed scheme will be 100% affordable housing and designed to integrate high-quality public open space, enhanced green infrastructure, and biodiversity improvements in line with policy requirements. Development will respond to the site's gateway role created by the new Cowley Branch Line station, ensuring strong connectivity, active travel routes, and high quality placemaking.
4. This scheme has been part of the Council's development programme for some time, with previous iterations exploring different scales and tenure mixes. It was originally included in the OCHL pipeline as a development site under a model where the Council would sell the land to OCH(D)L and subsequently purchase back the affordable homes. Following review, the scheme is now considered more appropriate for direct delivery by the Council. This change reflects its nature as a 100% affordable housing scheme on Council-owned land, which provides greater value for money for the HRA and ensures that development appraisal financial parameters are met.
5. The approach aligns with the wider strategy for Redbridge and Diamond Place, with these three schemes forming the cornerstone of the future direct delivery programme. Together, they will secure improved outcomes for affordable housing provision.
6. Capital budget provision within the HRA was approved by Council in February.

## Site Information

### 7. Image 1: Red Line Plan



8. The Site is a 5.15-hectare site in Blackbird Leys, currently in Council ownership and held within the General Fund for recreation purposes, including football pitches, a pavilion, and an area of hardstanding let to a third party.
9. The Site lies between two major transport corridors: the Eastern Bypass to the north and the Cowley Branch railway line to the south. It is accessed from Blackbird Leys Road to the southwest and sits adjacent to Oxford Retail Park and the ARC Business Park to the northeast.
10. It is well positioned near the proposed Cowley Branch Line station, offering strong connectivity and a future gateway role. It lies within Flood Zone 1 and has some surface water flood risk.
11. To enable delivery of the scheme and following completion and handover of the replacement facilities at Herschel Crescent, subject to the Cabinet approval, the land at the Sandy Lane site will be appropriated to planning purposes within the General Fund. Following the grant of planning permission and prior to the practical completion of any of the residential units, the site will be appropriated from the General Fund to the Housing Revenue Account, subject to approval by Full Council.

### Pitches Background and Strategy

12. Sandy Lane Recreation Ground currently accommodates four football pitches. These pitches serve as the home ground for Greater Leys Football Club and form part of the overall playing field hectareage available for local football activity. As such, the reprovision of this sporting function is essential to unlocking the housing development at Sandy Lane.

13. Sport England's Playing Fields Policy requires that any loss of playing field land is mitigated either through a like-for-like quantitative replacement of the land area or, where this is not achievable, through a qualitative improvement that provides equivalent or enhanced sporting value.
14. The emerging Local Plan 2045 states that specific consideration should be made for re-provision of enhanced pitch facilities in order to address the loss of this particular type of open space on the Sandy Lane site.
15. The Sandy Lane site is bigger than the Herschel Crescent site therefore there will be a loss of hectareage. This deficit means that a full quantitative replacement of playing field land is not feasible. Consequently, the scheme must adopt Sport England's qualitative improvement pathway, ensuring that the re-provision delivers enhanced pitch quality, year-round usability, improved facilities, and better overall accessibility for the community.
16. To meet this requirement, the Council is re-providing the pitch capacity currently available to Greater Leys FC through an upgraded offer at Herschel Crescent Recreation Ground. Four pitches will be delivered at Herschel Crescent, supported by new purpose-built changing facilities and secure storage. This improved site reflects community feedback and will provide more coherent and sustainable long-term football playing fields.
17. Alongside the Herschel Crescent re-provision, the Council is exploring the delivery of an additional pitch on an alternative Council-owned site. This additional pitch will help offset the quantitative land deficit and represents a proactive enhancement that further supports compliance with Sport England's Playing Fields Policy.
18. The freehold of Herschel Crescent is owned by the Council. It has been leased to Littlemore Parish Council for community recreation purposes, but the lease has been formally surrendered back to the Council. As part of this arrangement, the site will remain in recreational use, and the Council will assume responsibility for maintaining the improved playing fields, including drainage management, grounds upkeep and the running and lifecycle costs associated with the new changing facilities. Any future enhancements to the site must align with community and Council objectives.
19. Consultants and sports specialists have been commissioned to refine the detailed design of the re-provided pitches at Herschel Crescent and the additional pitch elsewhere. They are developing layouts and associated cost plans to ensure that the preferred solution delivers high-quality infrastructure, operational resilience and long-term value for Greater Leys FC, other local football stakeholders and the wider community.
20. Overall, this strategy complies with planning requirements and Sport England guidance by prioritising the delivery of high-quality, accessible and sustainable pitch infrastructure. In addition to maintaining equivalent access to pitch formats, the re-provision will provide Greater Leys FC with modernised, higher-specification facilities, improved drainage and more reliable year-round pitch availability, as well as enhanced changing rooms, storage and parking. This approach offers qualitative betterment over the current Sandy Lane provision and supports both community use and the release of the Sandy Lane site for urgently needed affordable housing.
21. Consultation with local clubs, Sport England, and ward members has informed the revised proposal, ensuring flexibility, safe access, and adequate storage. Initial Consultation has taken place with Sport England, local football stakeholders, ward

members, and community representatives to inform the proposal. Through these discussions, stakeholders highlighted the need for flexible pitch layouts, appropriate on site facilities and storage, safe access arrangements, sufficient parking capacity, and high quality maintenance. This feedback has directly shaped the preferred approach at Herschel Crescent, ensuring the design responds to operational needs and community priorities. Further consultation will continue throughout the design and planning stages to confirm mitigation requirements, refine the pitch layout, and ensure the proposals remain aligned with community needs and regulatory expectations.

22. The proposals seek to fully ensure the continuous use of current, or enhanced, football provision throughout, with no development on Sandy Lane until the new facilities are operational.

### Scheme Details

23. The scheme is detailed below, with additional information relating to the financial appraisal provided in Appendix 1 (commercially sensitive) to this report.
24. This is a 100% affordable housing scheme delivering 331 homes to meet general housing needs. The proposed mix includes flats ranging from 1-bedroom to 3-bedroom and houses of 4 bedrooms. Of these, 261 homes (79%) will be for Social Rent and 70 homes (21%) for Shared Ownership, ensuring full affordability across the development. The unit types include 1-bed, 2-bed, 3-bed, and 4-bed homes, with provision for larger family accommodation such as 4-bedroom (7 person) houses. Accessibility is also addressed, with 5% of homes built to the M4(3) standard (wheelchair accessible). Table 2 provides a detailed breakdown of tenure and unit types.

**Table 2: Tenure and unit types**

Size	SR	AR	SO	Total Aff
1B2PF	97		20	117
2B4PF	78		30	108
3B4PF	19		0	19
3B5PF	44		13	57
4B5PH	13		4	17
4B7PH	10		3	13
<b>Total</b>	<b>261</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>331</b>
<b>%</b>	<b>79%</b>		<b>21%</b>	<b>100%</b>

25. The mix across tenures and between houses and flats accommodates a balanced approach which seeks to prioritise affordability whilst ensuring the financial viability of the scheme.
26. A full multidisciplinary design team is engaged on the Sandy Lane scheme, ensuring comprehensive expertise across architecture, engineering, landscape, and planning disciplines. The design process has been informed by two pre-application submissions and three reviews by the Oxford Design Review Panel (DRP), which

have shaped the proposals to align with best practice and local policy. The scheme adopts a high-density yet relatively low-rise form, responding to the site's urban context and the emerging Local Plan aspirations. This approach balances the need for significant affordable housing delivery with sensitive integration into the surrounding residential environment. The design also reflects feedback from the DRP, focusing on placemaking, permeability, and sustainability.

27. The planning journey will follow a hybrid approach, with an outline application to establish key parameters and a reserved matters application to secure detailed design. The proposals respond proactively to the future Cowley Branch Line station, creating a gateway development that enhances connectivity and supports sustainable travel. The masterplan incorporates a central boulevard and station square, complemented by a hierarchy of green spaces, including a circular green corridor around the site to maintain biodiversity and provide high-quality amenity.
28. The Council is undertaking a strategic review to ensure that the emerging proposals take appropriate account of the opportunities and considerations associated with the Cowley Branch Line. This will include a broad assessment of how the scheme responds to potential connectivity, accessibility, and long-term sustainability benefits. The work completed to date has been developed in ongoing collaboration with key partners, and further coordination will continue as the proposals evolve to ensure strategic alignment.
29. Site-specific issues have been addressed, including ending the lease arrangement for the motorcycle training area on the hardstanding to the north of the site and the need to relocate existing sports pitches (as discussed in the Pitches Background and Strategy section above). The design proposal also mitigates constraints such as noise from adjacent transport corridors and level changes along Blackbird Leys Road, while safeguarding ecological buffers; delivering biodiversity net gain; and providing open green space surrounding the development suitable for walking and exercising.
30. Sustainability is embedded throughout the proposed scheme, with measures including Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems (SuDS), permeable paving, rain gardens, and a robust biodiversity strategy. The development will achieve policy-compliant energy efficiency standards and incorporate active travel infrastructure, car-free principles as outlined in the emerging local plan, and EV charging provision. The design prioritises pedestrian-friendly streets, shared surfaces, and high-quality materials to create a distinctive and enduring character.
31. The Council will undertake a high-level review to ensure that the emerging design and supporting financial model take appropriate account of the infrastructure considerations associated with a development of this scale. This will include a broad assessment of key service and community needs, alongside an overview of existing local capacity. Where any additional requirements are identified, the proposals will be refined as necessary to incorporate suitable provision.
32. In the proposal the homes will be designed to a high quality, exceeding a 40 per cent reduction in carbon emissions (against 2022 building standards). The scheme will use a fabric-first approach to minimise energy consumption and cost, with a target of zero carbon for regulated energy. An all-electric scheme is expected to achieve this, with air-source heat pumps and PV panels on roofs. An EPC rating of B or above is expected.
33. This is a low car development as it is close to public transport services and located in a Controlled Parking Zone (CPZ)

## Development Programme

34. The proposed development programme milestones are outlined in the table below.

**Table 1: Proposed Development Programme**

Project Milestone	Target Date
Play Pitch Relocation Planning Submission and determination	June 2026 – November 2026
New Playing Pitch facilities operational	August 2027
Appropriation of Sandy Lane to a Planning Purpose	September 2027
Outline Planning Submission for Sandy Lane	January 2027
Outline Determination	June 2027
Reserved Matters for Phase 1 (60 units) Planning Submission	August 2027
Reserved Matters for Phase 1 Determination	November 2027
Procurement for Phase 1	November 2027 - April 2028
Discharge Conditions and Enabling Works	May 2027 - July 2028
Start on Site Phase 1	June 2028
Appropriation from the GF to the HRA	November 2029
Handover Phase 1	December 2029
Completion all phases	Summer 2034

## Alternative Options Considered

35. A 'do nothing' option was considered but discounted. Retaining the site in its current form would not support the Council's strategic objective to increase the supply of affordable housing and would fail to maximise the potential of an under-utilised General Fund asset. The site is allocated for residential development in both the current Local Plan 2036 and the emerging Local Plan 2045, and therefore a non-intervention approach would not align with adopted or emerging policy direction. Furthermore, it would not address significant housing demand pressures in the city or contribute to the Council's Affordable Housing Supply Programme.
36. The Council also considered the sale of the site on the open market. While a disposal could generate a capital receipt, this option was rejected because it would not secure 100% affordable housing, nor guarantee that the scale, tenure mix, or design quality would reflect the Council's priorities. A sale would also result in the long-term loss of control over development outcomes and reduce opportunities to ensure the best value for the HRA and Oxford residents. For these reasons, outright disposal was deemed inconsistent with strategic corporate priorities.

37. A partnership or joint venture model was reviewed, including potential collaboration with registered providers or private sector partners. Although partnership models can transfer risk or accelerate delivery, they typically involve shared control, mixed-tenure outputs, and less flexibility in aligning delivery with the Council's programme and HRA business planning requirements. Given that the Sandy Lane scheme is intended to deliver 100% affordable housing on Council-owned land, a partnership arrangement was not considered to offer sufficient additional value and would introduce unnecessary complexity at this stage. Ownership of the homes is assumed within the HRA Business Plan.
38. Consideration was also given to progressing the scheme as an OCHL led development, where OCHL would be appointed as a developer and directly procure and contract with a design and construction contractor (usually involving sale of Council land to OCHL and purchase back of completed development). Following review, this approach was not taken forward. As a 100% affordable housing scheme on Council land, direct delivery by the Council (where the Council directly procures and contracts with a design and construction contractor) offers a stronger value-for-money position and aligns more closely with the wider strategic approach taken for other major sites such as Diamond Place and Redbridge. It also ensures full alignment with financial parameters already established for HRA-led schemes.
39. Finally, multiple alternative housing mix options were explored, including varying levels of shared ownership or introducing market housing. These were discounted as they would not meet the ambition for a wholly affordable scheme nor respond appropriately to Oxford's acute housing needs. The selected mix, predominantly Social Rent with a proportion of shared ownership, supports financial viability, meets a range of household needs, and aligns with policy expectations and the HRA business plan. Alternative mixes were modelled but were either financially unviable or delivered fewer homes at Social Rent levels, and therefore not recommended. As a 100% affordable housing scheme, all the homes are eligible for grant, so the net cost to the HRA is significantly improved.

### **Financial implications**

40. This report seeks the required delegations to further develop this scheme within the programme of affordable housing supply. The Council's Medium Term Finance Plan (MTFP), approved at Council on 13 February 2025, supports the 40-year HRA Business Plan, and makes provision for purchases of affordable housing from OCHL's 10-year development programme, alongside direct delivery by the Council, within an overall budget envelope of £385.6m (before grant and shared ownership sales).
41. The decision to proceed with any development will be supported by a development scheme appraisal/ financial modelling to ensure that financial parameters and requirements are met for OCHL and the HRA. These parameters have been previously agreed and for the HRA are as follows for each scheme:
42. a payback period of up to 70 years; and
43. a positive Net Present Value (NPV) over this period; and
44. an Internal Rate of Return (IRR) of at least 3%.
45. Meeting these parameters ensures that the HRA business plan remains financially robust. Conversely, not meeting these parameters will impact this position.

46. The proposed scheme will be eligible for Homes England funding, ideally through the portfolio approach in the Social and Affordable Housing Programme 26-36.

### **Legal issues**

47. The site is presently held in the General Fund for recreation/open space. Following completion and operation of the replacement facilities at Herschel Crescent, and subject to outline consent being in place, it is proposed to appropriate the land to *planning purposes* pursuant to section 122(1) Local Government Act 1972.

48. As site comprises open space, the Council will, where applicable, comply with the section 122(2A) LGA 1972 requirement to advertise the proposed appropriation and consider any objections before making a decision.

49. Appropriation to planning purposes would enable reliance, where necessary, on section 203 Housing and Planning Act 2016 to allow the development of the Scheme to proceed notwithstanding interference with certain third-party rights, with compensation payable in accordance with the legislation.

50. Prior to practical completion of the first units, a further appropriation from the General Fund to the Housing Revenue Account will be sought pursuant to section 19 Housing Act 1985.

51. Procurement of goods, services and works for the purpose of developing the scheme, including for the purpose of enabling the development by relocating the existing football pitches on the Sandy Lane site, must be carried out in accordance with the Council's Contract Rules, procurement procedures and in compliance with the Procurement Act 2023 (or any successor legislation) where applicable, including adherence to best value principles.

52. The proposals set out in this report fall within Council's statutory powers including the power to provide and manage housing through the HRA. The general power of competence under the Localism Act 2011 and the Local Authorities (Land) Act 1963 enables the Council to develop land it already owns. These powers support the proposed direct delivery by the Council of the Sandy Lane site.

53. The Council will need to enter into construction and consultancy contracts directly for this development, as well as agreeing a DSA with OCHL. The appointment of OCHL as development agent via a DSA may rely on the teckal exemption, provided the legal criteria are met. Such agreements must be carefully structured to comply with procurement law, avoid unlawful subsidy, and protect the Council's financial and delivery interests.

54. The Council's Constitution requires that the project approval for schemes of the value of £750,000 and over fall within the remit of the Cabinet and, therefore, the Cabinet has the power to take decisions in line with the recommendations contained in this report.

### **Level of risk**

55. Any risks inherent in this programme are already identified elsewhere, with actions to mitigate these detailed in the OCHL and HRA Business Plans and the Council's Medium Term Financial Plan.

56. A high-level risk register is included in Appendix 2 to support early-stage project approval. The principal risks relate to the reprovision of football pitches, statutory land

appropriation, planning pathway, financial viability within the HRA business plan, and compliance with procurement legislation. Mitigations are in place through established governance, legal oversight, and early engagement with key stakeholders including Sport England, Littlemore Parish Council, OCHL, the local community and Homes England.

### **Equalities impact**

57. There are no adverse impacts in undertaking this activity, with the potential to improve provision for persons in housing need, through the provision of more affordable and accessible housing to better meet client needs.
58. An Equalities Impact Assessment has been undertaken and is included in Appendix 3.

### **Carbon and Environmental Considerations**

59. All development schemes delivered by the Council / OCHL are subject to high sustainability standards with the expectation that they exceed statutory (building) standards.

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